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# Nicaragua's Contras Confront Infighting

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MIAMI—The growing struggle within the Nicaraguan Contra movement—which frequently finds the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency backing different leaders—may represent as great an obstacle to Washington's Central America policy as the Sandinista army itself.

The central question is whether this new infighting will hinder the anti-Sandinista evolution into a nationalistic movement with a political image that attracts new supporters. If it does, the Contras will continue to be a U.S.-proxy army led from exile by former officers of Anastasio Somoza's National Guard and members of Nicaragua's traditional ruling families.

Unless the Contras reform themselves and unite, they probably won't be able to retain their shaky financial support from Congress. (The supposed umbrella group, the United Nicaraguan Opposition, or UNO, was created largely to demonstrate to Capitol Hill that unity is on the way.) Nor will the Contras be able to capitalize on the widespread dissatisfaction with the Sandinistas inside Nicaragua.

## Two Men Are Backed

Following this logic, the State Department is strongly backing Alfonso Robelo and Arturo Cruz, who are the so-called moderate leaders of UNO. The principal fault line in the movement lies between these men and the camp of the third UNO director, Adolfo Calero. Contra conservatives argue that the moderates are creatures of a U.S. political establishment that doesn't understand Nicaraguan political realities.

"The agency and the State Department apparently have different Nicaraguan friends," says Robert Leiken, a Contra supporter and a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in Washington. "It means the conflict among Nicaraguans gets reproduced within the administration, and the conflict in the administration is echoed among the Nicaraguans."

More often than not, the State Department's main role is mediating quick-fix compromises that hold the movement together.

The department's problems bobbed to the surface at a Sept. 15 Nicaraguan-exile "unity" dinner in Miami. The State Department's Nicaragua desk officer edited anti-moderate proposals out of the speeches of two conservative Nicaraguan businessmen, and Vice President George Bush's son Jeb pleaded with them not to

criticize the UNO by name. (Jeb Bush, the Republican Party chairman for Dade County, Florida, is an unofficial liaison for his father with the Latin community.)

The businessmen held back their fiercest attacks but still denounced "Sandinismo without Sandinistas"—a reference to Messrs. Robelo and Cruz, who once were members of the Sandinista government.

Mr. Calero wrote a letter to the businessmen praising their speeches. He further distanced himself from his more-moderate colleagues by sending his note on the stationery of his own guerrilla faction, the Nicaraguan Democratic Front, or FDN, the largest Contra group.

That sort of backbiting was supposed to have been stopped by a tense three-week meeting of the three UNO directors held at the urging of Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, last May in Miami.

## Overhaul Reportedly Sought

Administration sources say that some officials in the State Department wanted a sweeping overhaul of Contra leadership but that the CIA moved to protect Mr. Calero and the FDN military chief, Enrique Bermudez, because they had been loyal and effective "assets" for years.

Mr. Calero made concessions on paper by agreeing to bolster the Contra human-rights commission and to allow UNO to handle foreign affairs and supervise military activities. But it was only a matter of weeks before Mr. Bermudez and right-wing civilians who surround Mr. Calero began to whittle away at the concessions and reassert the predominance of the FDN.

In the following months, the FDN formed a political movement and a military council consisting of only FDN commanders without consulting UNO. At a UNO summit earlier this month, State Department officials again asked that the three UNO leaders tone down their bickering.

The FDN kept its new political and military organs, however. Mr. Bermudez said in an interview that the military council wasn't UNO's business. The former National Guard colonel belittled the notion that Mr. Cruz and Mr. Robelo should have the power to oversee the FDN council. He dismissed UNO as a device to facilitate getting U.S. support, including the \$100 million aid package awaiting final approval in Washington. "The source of UNO is Congress," he said.

(The congressional fight over Contra aid has jeopardized the reelection bids of a

congressman in Washington state and one in Florida. See stories on page 34.)

Yet the moderates have achieved some victories. Marta Patricia Baltodano, a human-rights advocate, had second thoughts about taking control of the Contras' rights commission after she began to receive threats, including a telephoned death threat, last summer. In a meeting with the UNO directors in his office in August, Mr. Abrams, the assistant secretary of state, said the threats to Ms. Baltodano had to stop. "Calero said his people would never do such a thing," said an official who was present. "But he got the message." The threats stopped.

## Setbacks for Abrams

Mr. Abrams has had setbacks as well. When he attempted to get the enigmatic but charismatic Contra leader Eden Pastora back in the struggle last spring, the CIA moved to convince some Pastora officers to leave their leader in favor of another comandante.

One of the more dramatic examples of State Department-CIA disagreements came early this year, when Mr. Abrams decided earlier this year to allow Brooklyn Rivera and other leaders of Misurasata, an Indian rebel group, to visit Miskito Indian refugee camps in Honduras in an effort to win adherents. The FDN, the Honduran Army and the CIA prevented Mr. Rivera from reaching the camps until July. Once, when he thought he was being helicoptered to a refugee camp, he was flown instead into the base of a rival Indian force, Kisan. The CIA backs Kisan, which is aligned with the FDN.

As Armstrong Wiggins, a Misurasata leader who accompanied Mr. Rivera on the Honduras trip, tells the story, a Cuban-American CIA agent named "Jorge" organized the diversion. Mr. Wiggins flew to Washington to tell the State Department that its policy was being countermanded by the CIA agent. Mr. Wiggins says William Walker, deputy assistant secretary of state for Central America, told him, "We're trying, but we don't have people on the ground. . . . We have our differences with the (CIA) guys working in the field."

Mr. Walker says he doesn't remember his exact words, but he doesn't dispute Mr. Wiggins's version.